

From Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa,  
Volume 6 in the series *Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces*,  
edited by Richard G. Hovannian (Costa Mesa, CA, 2006),  
Chapter 6, pp. 137-153.

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## THE ARMENIAN PRESENCE IN EDESSA AFTER THE MUSLIM CONQUEST

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During the first decade of the seventh century, a bitter and protracted war of words broke out between the Armenian Catholicos, Abraham, and his Georgian counterpart, Kiurion. Their correspondence records the disintegration in the relationship between the two churches and the beginning of a schism that would prove to be permanent. In the course of his third letter, Abraham lists those Georgian bishops who had attended the Council of Dvin in 506, a gathering which, according to the letter, had condemned the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo.<sup>1</sup> Abraham admits that the original Armenian copy of the document reporting the decisions of that council had been destroyed during the Armenian uprising of 572 under Vardan Mamikonian against the Sasanian Persians.<sup>2</sup> But he

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<sup>1</sup> *Girk Tghtots* [Book of Letters], ed. Hovsep Izmiriants (Tiflis: T. Ravtiniants and M. Sharadze, 1901), pp. 180-83; French trans. Nina G. Garsoïan, *L'Eglise arménienne et le Grand Schisme d'Orient* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), pp. 565-70. The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, attempted to define the mystery of the union of Christ's humanity and divinity, maintaining that after the Incarnation, Christ existed "in two natures without confusion, without mutation, without division, without separation . . . in one hypostasis and in one person." While remaining the touchstone for orthodox doctrine in the Byzantine Empire, this definition proved to be unacceptable for many. The Armenian Church came to espouse a Monophysite position, according to which God the Word had a single incarnate nature. The definition reached at Chalcedon was strongly influenced by a letter (Tome) from Pope Leo I which also separated the properties of Christ between the two natures.

<sup>2</sup> This rebellion was encouraged, if not engineered, by the Byzantine emperor Justin II. Dvin, the seat of the Catholicos at this time, was extensively damaged during the uprising, and the Cathedral of Surb Grigor was destroyed by fire. While incapable of proof, Abraham's statement is therefore plausible. Vardan Mamikonian

then explains that a Greek copy of this document had been located in the city of Edessa and that an Armenian translation had been made from it.<sup>3</sup> He concedes that several of the Georgian names had become corrupted in the process of transmission and invites Kiurion to search out his own copy so that he might recognize all the individuals.<sup>4</sup> Nina Garsoian has recently questioned whether this council did in fact condemn the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo, suggesting that it had originally adopted an anti-Nestorian stance that was altered subsequently.<sup>5</sup> In the highly-charged atmosphere of the confrontation between Abraham and Kiurion, the sudden appearance of a document that fully justified the Armenian position should be treated with caution. But irrespective of the authenticity of the content and perspective of this belatedly-found letter, Abraham's explanation as to the origin of the letter reveals that he had no hesitation in asserting a contemporary connection between Armenia and the city of Edessa.

should not be confused with his fifth-century predecessor who confronted the Persian armies at Avarayr in 451.

<sup>3</sup> *Girk Tghtots*, p. 183: "And because the original draft of the agreement, which was in Armenian script, was destroyed in the rebellion, this was translated from a Greek letter in the city of Urha [Edessa] because they also had [a copy] from us." Garsoian, *L'Eglise arménienne*, p. 569, is slightly different.

<sup>4</sup> *Girk Tghtots*, p. 183: "And they were not able to translate rightly and clearly, as it was appropriate, because there were names of your bishops and sees which were very obvious and there were also [names] which were obscure and deformed. But if you wish in connection with the names of the bishops and locations, especially the corrupted names of your bishops, as they have been written, you can discover the real names of the sees and [the names of the] other [bishops], since we too were able to discover [the identities of] ours, through this process, especially if you should be able to locate the original draft of the agreement in your own script." Garsoian, *L'Eglise arménienne*, p. 569, has minor differences.

<sup>5</sup> Garsoian, *L'Eglise arménienne*, pp. 135-94. Nestorius was a patriarch of Constantinople who distinguished the divine and human natures of Christ and who was deposed by the Council of Ephesus in 431. Few fragments of his own compositions survive, making it very hard to work out what he really thought, as opposed to what others accused him of believing and promoting. The Church of the East, officially acknowledged in the Persian Empire, seems to have held a strongly Duophysite position, accepting both two natures and two hypostases, and is often characterised as "Nestorian." In fact, Nestorius had no contact with the Church of the East, none of his writings were known by that Church before the middle of the sixth century, and he was never referred to in any of its synods.

The Edessene origin of the letter was plausible, whether or not its content was genuine.

In making this link, Abraham was bearing witness to the long-standing and ongoing relationship between Armenia and Edessa. This may be traced with confidence back to the association of Mashtots, creator of the Armenian alphabet, and his pupils with the city in the first half of the fifth century. Koriun records that Mashtots met with Rabbula the bishop of Edessa and that he later sent two of his pupils, Hovsep and Eznik, to Edessa.<sup>6</sup> At this time, Edessa was a political and cultural center of the East Roman Empire and an ideal destination for Armenian scholars anxious to translate a substantial body of literature into Armenian. A clear reference to the school of the Armenians appears in a petition presented to a church council convened in Ephesus in 449.<sup>7</sup> This has long been recognized. However, there is a second reference to this institution, in the colophon to a manuscript, formerly in the British Museum and now in the British Library: "On fol. 60a there is a long note stating that this Ms [Add. 17,102] was written in 910 [599 A.D.] and collated with another copy of the school of the Armenians."<sup>8</sup>

Thus on the basis of these isolated references, it is apparent that Edessa continued to serve as a center for the translation of Syriac and Greek texts into Armenian during the second half of the sixth century and that the school of the Armenians was still functioning at the beginning of the seventh century. They attest an active Armenian presence in Edessa at that time.

<sup>6</sup> Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi* [Life of Mashtots], ed. Manuk Abegyan (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1941), pp. 46, 48, 74; English trans. Bedros Norehad, *The Life of Mashtots* (New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1964), pp. 30-31, 43; reprinted together, *Vark Mashtotsi*, ed. Krikor H. Maksoudian and Bedros Norehad (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Flemming, "Akten der Ephesinischen Synode vom Jahre 449," *Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Phil.-hist. Klasse, Neue Folge* 15:1 (1917): 25.

<sup>8</sup> William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838*, 3 vols. (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1870-1872), vol. 1, no. XVII, pp. 11-12. See also Garsoïan, *L'Eglise arménienne*, p. 69n97.

Advancing into the eleventh century, an Armenian presence may again be detected, with a series of prominent Armenian military commanders installed in Edessa. Their actions are reported by, among others, the Armenian chronicler Matthew of Edessa.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a number of churches are defined as “Armenian” at this time.<sup>10</sup> Given these two clusters of accessible material confirming an Armenian presence in Edessa at the beginning of the seventh century and in the middle of the eleventh century, there is a tendency to assume that Edessa possessed a distinct Armenian community throughout the intervening centuries. While the surviving materials indicate that there was contact between Armenia and Edessa, there is no absolute evidence to prove a permanent Armenian presence within the city throughout this time. Although it is highly probable that Armenians were living in Edessa during much, if not all of this period, their presence has not left its mark upon the surviving historical record.

### *The Armenian Sources*

Of the three major Armenian historical works that comment most directly on the Islamic conquest of the Near East and its

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Smbat *dux* of Edessa (overthrown and blinded in 1083), in *Patmutiun Matteosi Urhayetsvoy* [History of Matthew of Edessa], ed. anonymously in the Armenian convent of St. James in Jerusalem (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1869), p. 162; English trans. Ara E. Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), Pt. II, section 77 [p. 147]. Intriguingly the first specific reference to an Armenian commander in Edessa is late, occurring in the entry for the year 1065–66, when the unnamed Armenian *dux* of Antioch visited the city. See Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades*, Pt. II, section 27 [p. 108]. The first reference to Armenian infantry forces being stationed in Edessa occurs in section 28 [p. 109] under the year 1065–1066, and to Armenian nobles within the city in section 77 [p. 147] under the year 1083. In the year 1090–91, the Armenian Catholicos Barsegh transferred the seat of the Holy See to Edessa from Ani. See Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades*, Pt. II, section 92 [p. 156].

<sup>10</sup> For example, Surb Gevorg Gotevor (1083–84): *Patmutiun Matteosi Urhayetsvoy*, p. 161; Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades*, Pt. II, section 77 [p. 146]; and the cathedral (1092–93), when a famous Armenian relic was translated there: *Patmutiun Matteosi Urhayetsvoy*, p. 169; Dostourian, Pt. II, section 92 [p. 157].

aftermath, namely that attributed to Sebeos and those of Movses Daskhurantsi and Ghevond, only the first of these refers specifically to Edessa. It records that the brother of the emperor Heraclius, Theodore, expelled the Jewish population of the city after a short-lived revolt.<sup>11</sup> This event is associated in the text with Muhammad's divine revelation. There follows a coherent summary of the key elements of his preaching: belief in a single deity, a familiarity with the Old Testament, a divinely-sanctioned claim to the Holy Land through Abraham, and several prohibitions with regard to personal conduct.<sup>12</sup> Yet the two passages sit very uncomfortably together and it seems likely that they derive from separate sources. While the first connects the dramatic campaigns of the Arabs in the Near East with recent unrest in Edessa, the second supplies a considered account of the tenets of the new religion. The author of the first passage construed the Arab conquests as a product of local conditions, connecting them, mistakenly, with the expulsion of the Jews from the city of Edessa.<sup>13</sup> It is likely to have been the compiler himself who welded the two together. Thus while the scope of the History attributed to Sebeos extends specifically to Edessa, it does not attest an Armenian presence in Edessa.

In the light of the minimal contribution of these historical texts to conditions within Edessa at this time, let us turn instead to other works of Armenian literature. For the author of a seventh-century Armenian work of historical geography, the status of Edessa was unequivocal: it was one of the many cities within the country of Mesopotamia and the location of "an icon not made of human hands," referring undoubtedly to the *Mandylion*, the kerchief impressed with the image of

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<sup>11</sup> *Patmutiun Sebeosi* [History of Sebeos], ed. Gevorg V. Abgaryan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1979), p. 134; English trans. and intro. Robert W. Thomson, and historical comm. James Howard-Johnston, *The History Attributed to Sebeos*, 2 vols. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), vol. 1, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Abgaryan, *Patmutiun Sebeosi*, p. 135; Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Sebeos*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-Evaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos," *Le Muséon* 115:3-4 (2002): 365-66.

Christ.<sup>14</sup> In the second, slightly later version of this text, Edessa is the only Mesopotamian city to be named, implying a certain prominence in the opinion of the author. There is no suggestion, however, that he considered Edessa to be “Armenian.” It is the Mandylion that attracts his attention, rather than any Armenian claim to or presence within the city at this time.<sup>15</sup>

A short text appended to this work sheds a little more light upon Armenian perceptions of Edessa at this time. The *Mghonachapk* [Itinerary] has a complex relationship with the *Ashkharhatsoyts* which has yet to be completely resolved.<sup>16</sup> It describes eight separate journeys by land, six of which

<sup>14</sup> Ashot Abrahamyan, *Anania Shirakatsi: Matenagrutyune* [Anania of Shirak: Literary Works] (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1944), p. 351; reprinted in *Ashkharhatsoyts: The Seventh Century Geography Attributed to Ananias of Shirak*, intro. Robert H. Hewsen (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1994); Robert H. Hewsen, trans. and comm., *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhac’oyc): The Long and the Short Recensions* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992), p. 71A. This reference appears only in the later Short Recension.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the claim of King Pap to Edessa, in *Buzandaran Patmutiunk* [Epic Histories], also known as *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. Kerovbe Patkanian (St. Petersburg, 1883; reprinted Tiflis, 1912; Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), p. 195; trans., intro., and comm. Nina G. Garsoian, *The Epic Histories [Buzandaran P’atmutiunk]* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), Bk V, ch. xxxii [p. 213]. The Mandylion was eventually transferred to Constantinople in 944.

<sup>16</sup> A version of this text, taken from the oldest available manuscript, was published by Hakob Manandian, *O torgovle i gorodakh Armenii v sviazi s mirovoi torgovlei drevnikh vremen* [The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade] (Erevan: Erevan State University Press, 1945), pp. 253-54; English trans. Nina G. Garsoian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1965), pp. 169-70. Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, pp. 320-21, provides a slightly different English translation which takes account of other known manuscripts. Both Abrahamyan, *Anania Shirakatsi*, p. 152, and Manandyan, *O torgovle*, pp. 127-43, consider that the *Mghonachapk* was originally part of the *Ashkharhatsoyts*. Manandian (p. 259) argues: “The guiding line used by me in the study and dating of the monuments of Armenian literature has been the general concept of the socio-economic development of Armenia. In my opinion, such works as the *Armenian Geography* and the *Distance in Miles* which were of particular interest to the burghers and Armenian merchants, could appear in Armenia only in the period of the development of commerce and international relations, that is to say precisely in the IXth century.” This reasoning, however, can no longer be accepted. Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, p. 320, leaves the question open.

originate in Armenia. Two of the eight refer to Edessa:

- (2) From Dvin to Khlat-170 miles, from there to Khlimar-80, from there to Urha [Edessa]-180, from there to the Euphrates River-40, from there to Emesa-150, from there to Damascus-20, from there to Mount Tabor-90, from there to Jerusalem-5.
- (5) From Gandzak to Nineveh-120, from there to Nisibis-120, from there to Urha-150.<sup>17</sup>

The second itinerary therefore traces the route between Dvin and Jerusalem via Edessa. The Armenian presence in Jerusalem in the seventh century is well-attested. There were permanent Armenian monastic communities in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Holy Land by this period.<sup>18</sup> There was also a flow of pilgrims from Armenia to the holy sites in Jerusalem, Judea, and Sinai as well as a regular exchange of correspondence back and forth between the respective churches.<sup>19</sup> The *Mghonachapk* confirms that Edessa was one of the centers through which such travelers to Jerusalem passed. Its location made it an obvious staging post on the regular pilgrim route.

A little-studied chapter from the *History of Aghvank* attributed to Movses Daskhurantsi provides indirect support for this proposition. Book II, chapter 50, describes a succession of visits to Jerusalem by two hermits, Mkhitar and Hovsep, undertaken with the aim of collecting relics for transport back to Armenia.<sup>20</sup> It records that Mkhitar was in Jerusalem during

<sup>17</sup> See Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, p. 321, for the complete text.

<sup>18</sup> The most recent mosaic inscription to be unearthed, in the Musrara quarter of Jerusalem to the north of the Damascus Gate, has been dated to the middle of the seventh century. See Michael E. Stone, "The New Armenian Inscriptions from Jerusalem," in *Armenian Perspectives*, ed. Nicholas Awde (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1997), pp. 263-68.

<sup>19</sup> For a useful summary of the evidence for pilgrimage, see Michael E. Stone, "Holy Land Pilgrimage of Armenians before the Arab Conquest," *Revue Biblique* 93 (1986): 93-110. For an important exchange of ecclesiastical correspondence, see Abgaryan, *Patmutiun Sebeosi*, pp. 116-21; Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Sebeos*, pp. 70-76; Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes," p. 327 and n16.

<sup>20</sup> Varag Arakelyan, *Movses Kaghankatuatsi. Patmutiun Aghvanits Ashkharhi* [Movses Kaghankatuatsi: The History of Albania] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1983), pp. 280-82; English trans. Charles J. F. Dowsett, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Moses Dasxuranci* (London, New York, and Toronto:

the troubled conditions of the late 630s. Having gained possession of suitable relics, he “journeyed by the Roman side from fear of the enemy.”<sup>21</sup> His travels took him back to Armenia but by way of Seleucia far to the west. It seems that the Arab invasions had deterred him from returning along the direct route home via Syria and Mesopotamia. It is the enforced change of plan that was considered worthy of comment, rather than the usual route, which presumably would have taken him back through Edessa.

The second itinerary is relevant to the relationship between Armenia and Edessa only if it can be shown to have been composed after the period of the Arab conquests. Three features of the *Mghonachapk* favor such a date.<sup>22</sup> In the first place, the fourth itinerary refers to Akoghay (Kufa) and Basra, both new foundations in Iraq after 638. This supplies a secure *terminus post quem*. However this same itinerary does not mention either Baghdad or Samarra, founded respectively in the third quarter of the eighth century and the third decade of the ninth century. Instead, the old Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, is included in the route. This suggests that this text was put together before the Abbasid revolution against the Umayyad Caliphate in the middle of the eighth century. Finally the first itinerary contemplates a time when Karin (Erzerum) was no longer in Byzantine control. It notes:

- 1) from Karin to the ditch separating the land of the Armenians from the land of the Greeks-100, from there to Kolonia-90.<sup>23</sup>

This implies that at the date of composition, the frontier between the Byzantine Empire and Armenia had stabilized approximately halfway between Karin and Kolonia. The Byzantine forces were ejected permanently from Karin in or shortly after 661, when Hamazasp Mamikonian was replaced

Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 181-83.

<sup>21</sup> Arakelyan, *Movses*, p. 281; Dowsett, *Caucasian Albanians*, p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> For all of these, see Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, p. 321.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

as "Prince of Armenia" by Grigor Mamikonian, the loyal client of the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya.<sup>24</sup> Byzantine troops did not occupy Karin again until the temporary recapture of the city by the emperor Constantine V a century later.<sup>25</sup> Collectively, therefore, these internal references indicate that the *Mghonachapk* was composed between 660 and 750. Edessa was known to be one of the major cities on the route between Armenia and Jerusalem at this time.<sup>26</sup>

As noted, the nature of the relationship between the *Mghonachapk* and the *Ashkharhatsoyts* has long been a matter of debate. The traditional view has been that they originally formed a single text. Close textual comparison affords fresh insight. Although the majority of the places referred to in the *Mghonachapk* also appear in the *Ashkharhatsoyts*, a significant minority do not.<sup>27</sup> It seems unlikely that a text possessing the scope and precision of the *Ashkharhatsoyts* would have had an appendix which overlapped so imperfectly with the remainder

<sup>24</sup> This occurred after the conclusion of the *History* attributed to Sebeos. See, however, *Hovhannu katoghikosi Draskhanakertetsvoi Patmutiun Hayots* [Catholicos Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi's *History of Armenia*], ed. Mkrtich Emin (Moscow, 1853; reprinted Tiflis 1912; Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1980), p. 89. English trans. and comm. Krikor H. Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertci: History of Armenians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), XX.1-3.

<sup>25</sup> Ghevond, *Patmutiun Ghevondiay Metsi Vardapeti Hayots* [History of Ghevond, Great Vardapet of Armenia] ed. Karapet Ezian (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodovi, 1887), pp. 129-30; English trans., intro., and comm. Zaven Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond, The Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians* (Wynnewood, PA: St. Sahag and St. Mesrop Armenian Church, 1982), p. 124.

<sup>26</sup> It is intriguing to note that the travels of Movses Khorenatsi purportedly at the behest of the Catholicos Sahak took him from Armenia via Edessa to Jerusalem and the Holy Places. See his *Patmutiun Hayots* [*History of Armenia*], ed. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis, 1913; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981), pp. 343-46; English trans., intro., and comm. Robert W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), Bk III, ch. 62 [pp. 337-39]. Thomson has noted that much of the metaphorical language employed in this chapter is derived from works by Philo and Pseudo-Callisthenes, and it is clearly a construct of the author. The reference to Edessa may be no more than an echo, picking up on earlier passages in which this city features prominently. The contention that this description of Movses' travels supports the sequence articulated in the second itinerary must therefore remain wholly speculative.

<sup>27</sup> The minority: the frontier ditch, Kolonia, Niksar, Amasia, Angora, Khlimar, Mount Tabor, Berdkunk, Nisibis, Ardabil, Kulp, and Kot, in total 12 out of 43 places.

of the text. Moreover, the function of such an appendix in the context of the whole work is hard to fathom. Instead of forcing these two texts together, it seems much simpler to reject the standard interpretation and acknowledge that they comprise two independent texts which became combined in the course of transmission.

Although the *Mghonachapk* shows that after the Arab conquests Edessa continued to be recognized as one of the staging posts on the route from Dvin to Jerusalem and therefore implies a pattern of communication between the two cities, it has proved impossible to find even one Armenian who undertook that journey. However a little-known eighth-century hagiographical text reveals that Edessa was visited by named Armenians traveling from Armenia to Resafa (Sergiopolis), the site of the famous martyrium of Saint Sergius and the residence of Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (January 724–February 743). The *Life of Vahan Goghtnatsi* describes how Vahan passed through Edessa in 737 on his way to “Kalinikos and Rutsap, the dwelling place of Sham, prince of the Arabs,” where he was martyred.<sup>28</sup> While in Edessa, Vahan reportedly worshiped the “redeeming image”; this seems to be another reference to the kerchief (Mandylion) with the impression of Christ’s face. The colophon associated with this work supplies important additional information. It records that the author of the work, the abbot Artavazd of Erazkhavor, visited Resafa seven years after the death of Vahan and obtained there an account of his martyrdom “in the Roman script.”<sup>29</sup> He then traveled back to “the city of Urha” and having implored the bishop, “we translated the book into the Armenian language.” There is a second version of this work and its colophon, based on a manuscript in the Matenadaran in Erevan which records that Artavazd and his companions “came to Urha and we implored the bishop to translate the discourses from the Roman script into Armenian.”<sup>30</sup> Logically this version

<sup>28</sup> *Vkayabanutium Srboyn Vahanay Goghtnatsvoy* [Martyrology of Saint Vahan Goghtnatsi] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1854), p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> Artashes S. Matevosyan, *Hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner*, 5-12 dd.

seems to make more sense. In any event, the text associates Edessa directly with the translation of a work from Greek into Armenian. Moreover, it seems that the bishop of Edessa was able to understand and use Armenian in 744; conversely, Artavazd emerges as someone who does not know Greek. Admittedly some care needs to be taken with this evidence, not least because the presentation of Edessa as a place for translation is almost a *topos*, one that has already been encountered above. In spite of this reservation, the work seems to contain valid evidence that Armenians visited Edessa in the second quarter of the eighth century. Again however, it does not specifically mention a permanent Armenian element in the community.

Thus far, the Armenian sources have revealed a possible pattern of contact between Edessa and Armenia in this period but have contributed no firm evidence to indicate a permanent Armenian presence there. In previous studies, the attendance of six Syrian bishops at an Armenian Church council, convened in Manzikert in 726, has been used to prove such a presence.<sup>31</sup> No fewer than three accounts of the transactions of this council exist: one in the *Book of Letters*, attributed to Hovhannes of Odzun the Armenian Catholicos, a second in the twelfth-century *History* of Samuel Anetsi, and a third in the

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[Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 5th-12th Centuries] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1988), no. 38B, Matenadaran Ms 4803.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Judah B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 208: "The third denomination, the anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites, consisted already in the middle of the fifth century of two separate groups, the 'Syrians' or Jacobites, and the Armenians. Like the Persians, both the Syrian community and the Armenian community each maintained its own school at Edessa at that time. The Armenians were a recognized section of the population in the reign of Caliph Abd al-Malik. In 728, a Council of the Armenian Church at Manzikert was attended by the Metropolitan of Edessa; then the Council of Chalcedon was repudiated, union was established between the Armenians and Jacobites, and certain ritual practices were instituted, which are still in force." This paragraph runs together a *mélange* of material, the implication being that the Council of Manzikert resolved differences between Armenians and Jacobites in Edessa. This is mistaken. Moreover, no reference is supplied for the recognition of the Armenian section of the population by 'Abd al-Malik.

Syriac *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian.<sup>32</sup> This instance of direct contact between the two churches, is significant, given that it occurred after the final rupture between the Greek Church and the Armenian Church following the Quinisext council in Trullo in 692.<sup>33</sup> It seems to mark a new chapter in relations between two churches which were now permanently outside the orbit of Constantinople and reflects a growing self-confidence on the part of the Armenian Church. The compilation of the *Book of Letters* and the codification of ecclesiastical canon law, both of which are attributed to Catholicos Hovhannes, may also attest this self-assurance. But without embarking upon an exhaustive textual criticism of these three accounts and their differences, quite simply they do not comment upon an Armenian community in Edessa.

The account attributed to Hovhannes records that six bishops from the so-called Jacobite house, including the metropolitan of Edessa, attended the council for the sake of entering a union of confession with the Armenian Church:

Each one of these had come to us at the command of the archbishop of Antioch for a council of reconciliation and a uniting with one another in faith.<sup>34</sup>

Having rehearsed a complicated sequence of arguments against the Council of Chalcedon and its belief in the two natures of Christ, Hovhannes summarized orthodox doctrine in a simple declaration which the Syrian representatives approved.<sup>35</sup> They then returned to their own country, allowing Hovhannes to

<sup>32</sup> *Girk Tghtots*, pp. 220-33; *Samueli kahanayi Anetsvoy. Havakmunk i grots patmagrats* [Samuel Priest of Ani: Compilation of Historical Writings], ed. Arshak Ter-Mikelian (Vagharshapat: Holy See, 1893), pp. 187-88; partial German translation in Erwand Ter Minassiantz, *Die armenische Kirche in ihren Beziehungen zu den syrischen Kirchen bis zum Ende des 13 Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1904), pp. 77-78; *Chronique de Michel le Syrien Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, ed. and trans. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, 4 vols. (Paris: L'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1899-1910), vol. 2, Bk XI, ch. xx (pp. 492-500).

<sup>33</sup> Garsoian, *L'Eglise arménienne*, pp. 394-96, 405.

<sup>34</sup> *Girk Tghtots*, p. 224.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224-27.

move on to other matters.

The account in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian differs in two major respects. Whereas the letter of Hovhannes is taken up with theological proofs supporting the Armenian position, the Syriac report passes rapidly over the terms of the debate, concentrating instead on the declaration of faith achieved by the council and ten anathemas that accompanied that declaration.<sup>36</sup> This work also supplies a context for the attempted reconciliation between the churches, an issue that was not addressed by Hovhannes. According to Michael, a community of monks from the region of Maiperqat claimed that only they and the inhabitants of the mountain of Sasun had maintained the Armenian confession in the whole of the Jazira.<sup>37</sup> Correspondence had been exchanged between the two churches on this issue, and this had in turn led to the convening of the council. The text therefore suggests that there was at least one monastic community in northern Mesopotamia which had, or purported to have, a connection with the Armenian Church. Again, however, there is nothing to link this to the city of Edessa.

In summary, references to Edessa in Armenian sources during this period are rare. When taken collectively, they suggest that Edessa remained within Armenian consciousness. It is certain that Vahan Goghtnatsi and Artavazd visited Edessa in 737 and 744 while traveling to and from Resafa/Sergiopolis. Moreover it is likely that intermittent contact between Armenia and Edessa was maintained through the location of this city on the route to Jerusalem. However there is no solid evidence of a permanent Armenian presence within Edessa at this time.

### *The Syriac Sources*

Until now, the question of an Armenian community within Edessa has been viewed from the perspective of predominantly Armenian sources. But it should also be considered, albeit briefly, from the point of view of the surviving Syriac texts.

<sup>36</sup> Chabot, *Michel le Syrien*, pp. 496-500.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 492-94.

As it advances toward the date of its composition, around 775, the *Chronicle* of Zuqnin comprises increasingly long and detailed notices of current events, and the hardships suffered at the hands of rapacious Abbasid administrators.<sup>38</sup> On two occasions, it refers to the inhabitants of Edessa; for the chronicler, they were either “Syrians” or “Arabs.”<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that he was unaware of Armenians in Mesopotamia. He describes a large-scale emigration of Armenians in 750, caused by a devastating famine, although he does not specify from where they come.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, under the year 753–54, he records the activities of one “Koushan the Armenian,” a military leader from the former Byzantine province of Armenia IV who raided the northern regions of Mesopotamia and defeated the Arab forces sent in response.<sup>41</sup> Some fifteen years later, a large number of Armenians left the Byzantine territory and sought permission to settle in Mesopotamia.<sup>42</sup> These isolated references demonstrate the instability of the border regions between the Muslim and Byzantine powers and how Armenians both exploited and suffered in, these disturbed conditions. They reveal that Armenian communities did exist in Mesopotamia during the eighth century. The twelfth-century tract attributed to Dionysius Barsalibi, *Against the Armenians*, attests a similar process of Armenian migration during the eighth century.<sup>43</sup> It correlates the movement of Armenians into

<sup>38</sup> *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum I*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot (Louvain: Secretariat du CSCO, 1927), pp. 196–378; French trans. Robert Hespel, *Chronicon Anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), pp. 151–309.

<sup>39</sup> Chabot, *pseudo-Dionysianum*, pp. 281, 312; Hespel, *Chronicon Anonymum*, pp. 223, 251, under the years 769–70 and 772–73 respectively.

<sup>40</sup> Chabot, *pseudo-Dionysianum*, pp. 204–06; Hespel, *Chronicon Anonymum*, pp. 159–60.

<sup>41</sup> Chabot, *pseudo-Dionysianum*, pp. 208–10; Hespel, *Chronicon Anonymum*, pp. 162–63.

<sup>42</sup> Chabot, *pseudo-Dionysianum*, p. 265; Hespel, *Chronicon Anonymum*, p. 209. This appears under the year 769–70 and includes a reference to those who had fought with Koushan. It may be significant that prince Tachat Andzevetsi also transferred from Byzantine to Arab service twelve years later. See Ghevond, *Patmutiun*, pp. 158–60, and Arzoumanian, *Lewond*, pp. 140–42.

<sup>43</sup> Alphonse Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies IV: *The Work of Dionysius Barsalibi*

Syria with the time of the Council of Manzikert (726), suggesting that Hovhannes was compelled to appoint three bishops for this newly-arrived Armenian population and complaining that the Armenians "gradually seized our churches and the monasteries situated in the Black Mountain." In view of the late date of this polemical work, and the circumstances under which it was compiled, this coincidence should be treated as intriguing but not necessarily decisive. Hostility towards the Armenian community at the time of composition may lie behind such entries.

One further Syriac reference deserves brief mention. Within a sequence of canons attributed to Jacob of Edessa, a Syriac bishop and theologian active in the second half of the seventh century, a fragment from a separate text has been preserved.<sup>44</sup> In response to a neutral question on the contamination of the holy altar, Jacob launches into a fierce condemnation of Armenian practices and beliefs. These are reviled as a heretical concoction of Jewish, Chalcedonian, Nestorian, Arab, and even pagan origin.<sup>45</sup> These are not linked to any specific Armenian

*'Against the Armenians'* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1931), p. 55.

It is now four hundred and forty years since the Armenians came into the region of Syria and took possession of our countries, monasteries and villages. We had the patriarch Mar Athanasius who in the year one thousand and thirty seven of the Greeks [726 A.D.] affected his union with Ohannes their Catholicos in Manasgert of the interior. At that time since the Kingdom of the Armenians was conquered by the Persians who were holding sway in it, they began to come down little by little to Syria. . . . And our Patriarch alienated [ceded] to Ohannes a monastery situated on the frontiers and he placed therein Syrian and Armenian boys who learned both the Syrian and Armenian languages and translated the works of the Fathers from Syrian into Armenian . . . little by little they seized our churches and the monasteries situated in the Black Mountain.

<sup>44</sup> Ms Paris syr. 111, fols. 192a-93b, ed. and trans. Carl Kayser, *Die Canones Jacob's von Edessa übersetzt und erläutert* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1886), pp. 3-4 [text], 34-35 [translation]; French trans. Francois Nau, *Les canons et résolutions canoniques de Rabboula, Jean de Tella, Cyriaque d'Amid, Jacques d'Edesse, Georges des Arabes, Cyriaque d'Antioche, Jean III, Théodore d'Antioche et des Perses* (Extrait du *Canoniste contemporain*, juillet-août 1903 à janvier 1906) (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1906), sections 80-81, pp. 67-69.

<sup>45</sup> Nau, *Les canons*, section 81, p. 69 [translated from the French]:

So they follow the Jews when they offer the lamb [or a sacrifice] and the unleavened bread and the pure wine, they consecrate salt as well and follow

community. It is not clear how such a polemical fragment came to lodge within these canons, nor whether it is correct to attribute it to the era of Jacob of Edessa, let alone Jacob himself. The combination of vivid insults is forceful. It is impossible to say whether they betray any personal experience of contemporary practice of the Armenian Church or whether they form a convenient collection of general criticisms. Certainly none of these practices is discussed in the decisions of the Council of Manzikert, which is surprising if they were of such significance to a bishop of Edessa only a generation before. The historical value of the fragment must remain for the moment undetermined.

### *Conclusion*

The Armenian presence in Edessa at the beginning of the seventh century is attested in contemporary sources. Thereafter, that presence vanishes from the written record. This does not mean that Edessa disappears from the horizon of Armenian perception. Contact between Armenia and Edessa was maintained. Armenian sources of the later seventh and eighth centuries point to continued contact with Mesopotamia, and indicate that Edessa may have been a staging point on the route between Armenia and Jerusalem. There seems to be little doubt that Edessa was visited by Vahan Goghtnatsi in 737 and by Artavazd some seven years later. The Syriac sources largely complement the Armenian materials, attesting that Armenians settled in northern Mesopotamia in the second half of the eighth century and suggesting that this caused confessional tension. It is probable, even likely, that an Armenian community existed within Edessa throughout this period. However,

the Jews in other practices worse than these. They follow the Chalcedonians in making the sign of the Cross with two [fingers]; the Nestorians because they move the hand from right to left; the Arabs because they make three genuflections to the south when they make a sacrifice; the pagans because without exception when someone dies, they offer on him the holy sacrament and it is in that in particular that they annoy God, because it is not permitted at all to offer the holy sacrament on a corpse on the day of his death, for this custom is pagan and Jewish and it is alien to the truth of the church of God.

it was not one that has left an impression in the surviving written materials. It is only in the second half of the eleventh century that an Armenian community in Edessa resurfaces in the historical record.